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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002337

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND DRL/PHD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CEN AND DCHA/DG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN ELECTIONS NEWS: UPDATE 14

REF: Tegucigalpa 2327 and previous

FOPRIDEH Urges Voters to Cross Vote

1. The umbrella NGO Federation of Development Organizations of Honduras (FOPRIDEH) is conducting a voter education campaign, partially funded by USAID's Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), called "Educational Campaign for Elections 2005. The motto of the campaign is "You can cross your vote" and encourages voters not to vote strictly on party lines. FOPRIDEH urges the public to actively consider the wide variety of Congressional candidates from the five parties instead of voting for all the candidates from one specific party, as was the only option under the old system. This could be a somewhat daunting task in the larger departments since Congressmen are elected at-large. For example, in Francisco Morazan, voters need to consider 115 candidates vying for the 23 seats. In previous elections, voters cast one vote amongst the five contesting parties. Seats were determined proportionally by party vote, with the winning candidates assigned by the party list in rank order. Since the parties controlled the makeup and order of the party list, candidates were beholden to the political parties rather than to the electorate.

2. The Director of FOPRIDEH, Jose Leon Aguilar, said that the aim of the campaign is to change the public's attitude about straight ticket voting. Furthermore, Aguilar stated, as the result of the new Electoral Law, Hondurans now have the opportunity to choose their candidates and make the elected officials more responsive to their electorate. In doing so, Aguilar believes the voting public will select the best qualified candidates, who will in turn, improve the makeup of the National Congress.

3. In its campaign, FOPRIDEH is utilizing banners and posters, and is buying newspaper and television ads, to educate the general public. In addition, it will provide citizens with sample electoral ballots specific to their department to inform the voters on the numbers of seats to be elected from their respective department. This education campaign is critical since every department has a different number of congressional seats, and voters who exceed this number in completing their ballots will have their vote nullified.

4. National Party congressional candidate and key campaign operative David Matamoros complained to PolChief about the campaign, saying there was nothing wrong with straight ticket voting. PolChief concurred that this was still a legitimate option for voters, but that the goal of the campaign was to educate voters about their increased options under the new Electoral Law.

Public Ministry To Monitor Possible Voting List Problems

5. The Public Ministry (MP) appears ready to intervene in situations potentially involving voting list irregularities. To demonstrate this, Attorney General Leonidas Rosa Bautista personally picked up the official electoral census from the National Registry of Persons (RNP). Delegates of the Human Rights Commissioner were also present and likewise were given copies of the list. However, the Attorney General publicly stated that the MP will not take any action on complaints filed against any of the candidates until after the elections.

6. RNP Director Mario Aguilar Gonzales explained that the voting list contains the registry of all Hondurans who will be able to vote in the November general elections, including those who changed their domicile and first time voters. At a meeting between the MP and RNP, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights was selected to serve as liaison between both institutions. This office will be in charge of noting all reported irregularities regarding voting identities. The list was also handed over to representatives of each of the five political parties.

7. National Party politician Matamoros complained to PolChief about the voting list November 16, saying that there were still many problems to be resolved with the list.

Parties Receive Policy Whitepaper from Catholic Cardinal

18. In a ceremony presided over by Roman Catholic Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez and Juan Ferrera, Secretary of the National Unity Forum (FONAC), the five presidential candidates or their representatives received a document entitled "A Nation's Vision." FONAC prepared the document, which is meant to serve as a guidepost for action by future elected leaders. Three presidential candidates were present at the event: Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo (National Party), Dr. Juan Almandares (Democratic Unification Party), and Juan Ramon Martinez (Christian Democratic Party). The Liberal Party was represented by Congressman Jorge Arturo Reina and the Party for Innovation and National Unity by VP candidate Olga Morales Galindo.

19. During his remarks, Cardinal Rodriguez said that this vision for the nation must be acted on and challenged the presidential candidates to sign the document and make a commitment to the entire nation to implement it. Further, he specifically spoke of the matter of justice in Honduras, and noted that if injustice is addressed, then corruption will decrease. All five political parties signed "A Nation's Vision" at a ceremony the week after the presidential candidates received the document.

TSE Opens Electoral Operations Warehouse

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10. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) opened an election operations warehouse at the National Institute of Professional Education (INFOP). The same facility was used during the February primary elections and was recently visited by PolOffs and AIDOffs. The TSE is hiring some 300 temporary workers to help prepare for the election and to organize materials for each of the nearly 14,000 electoral tables throughout the country.

11. TSE Magistrate Jacobo Hernandez said that all temporary workers that will be hired to handle electoral materials will be very carefully screened due to the sensitivity of the material. Some examples of the information/material handled by the TSE are: 12 million ballots, the voting list, the electoral notebooks, and general office supplies needed for tens of thousands of poll workers. According to the electoral calendar, election materials will be distributed one week prior to the November 27 general election.

12. To protect the integrity of election materials, the military is providing physical security at the election operations warehouse at INFOP and at the four companies printing the election ballots. In total, around 9,000 members of the Honduran Armed Forces will be entrusted with the custody of the election materials throughout the nation.

UD presents financial statements to the TSE

13. Officials of the Democratic Unification Party (UD) submitted a financial disclosure statement to the TSE as required by Electoral Law. The financial statement covers the period from 2001 to the present. UD was represented by Martin Pineda, general campaign director, who was accompanied by Congresswoman Doris Gutierrez, Alternate Congressman Rafael Alegria, and Carlos del Cid, the candidate for Mayor of Tegucigalpa.

14. The UD leaders noted that all political parties must do likewise as required by Law. Further, they spoke of the need for transparency, especially with regards to the campaign financing of the two major parties. The Liberal and National Parties have just submitted their financial statements to the TSE (see forthcoming septel).

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